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SUBJECT: SPEAKER EXPLAINS U.S. VIEWS ON GLOBAL AND
ANDEAN-REGION TERRORISM

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Rand Corporation Senior Policy Analyst, Dr. Angel Rabasa, traveled to Venezuela February 28-March 5 to address the media, national police, private security organizations, and academic audiences on the topic of terrorism. Rabasa's visit was designed by PAS Caracas to lay the groundwork for future counterterrorism programming, and was therefore planned as a contextualization of the global terrorist threat and the U.S. response since September 2001. In the country's two largest cities, Caracas and Maracaibo, Rabasa made the case for the Global War on Terror, while at the same time relaying U.S. and international concerns over rumored GoV support for Colombian insurgencies. END SUMMARY.

THE MESSAGE

2. (U) PAS Caracas plans a series of terrorism-related programming in the year ahead, focusing primarily on the issues of terrorist financing and document fraud. However, before beginning to address that specific subset of issues relevant here in Venezuela, it was important to lay the groundwork with an introductory explanation of how the U.S. views the global threat posed by Islamic extremist terrorist organizations, the regional context of this threat, the actions the U.S. has taken around the world in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, and actions that can be taken by regional governments and business to help curb that threat. Rabasa's visit served as the opening salvo in this campaign, and helped lay the groundwork for future related programming.

3. (SBU) Dr. Angel Rabasa, whose expertise includes Colombia, was able to subtly raise the issue of suspected ideological and other support given by elements of the Venezuelan government to Colombian rebel groups, in a way that official representatives of the USG are not free to do. This particular message resonated with many of the speaker's audiences, particularly as his visit followed shortly after the highly-publicized case of the capture of a high ranking FARC figure in Caracas.

SECURITY PROFESSIONALS HEAR THE U.S. CASE

4. (U) Though Embassy Caracas finds its government-to-government contacts in Venezuela limited, the head of the CICPC (FBI-analogous national police) academy, a former International Visitor Program participant, agreed to allow a group of his cadets and instructors to be addressed by Rabasa. Though appearing skeptical, and asking some tough questions at the end of the speaker's presentation, the cadets were an important group for this message to reach. They will be the next generation of crime investigators in Venezuela, and some will no doubt work on investigated and preventing terrorist cases.

5. (U) Dr. Rabasa also addressed two locally significant groups of security professionals, whose representatives form the front line against terrorist threats to both American and Venezuelan businesses in this country. Rabasa first spoke to members of the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), which represents security executives of U.S. corporations and interests in Venezuela. He later addressed the Venezuelan Association of Security Executives (AVES, by its Spanish initials), whose members are the heads of security for some of Venezuela's largest corporations, both private and public. This audience of 80 was particularly appreciative of Rabasa's visit, and expressed great interest in cooperating with the embassy on future projects.

ENGAGING ACADEMIC AUDIENCES

16. (U) In Caracas, Dr. Rabasa addressed mixed audiences of undergraduate and graduate students and professors at three prestigious universities: Universidad Simon Bolivar (public), Universidad Catolica Andres Bello and Universidad Monte Avila (both private). The USB and UMA audiences were smaller groups and provided an opportunity

for a high level of academic discourse and some truly insightful questions from students and faculty alike, while the UCAB audience was large (100+ undergraduates pursuing law degrees) and included questions from some students who were clearly skeptical of U.S. policy, particularly regarding the war in Iraq as it relates to our definition of terrorism (i.e. the victimizing of civilian populations).

17. (U) In the country's second largest city, Maracaibo, Rabasa met with students and faculty of the Universidad del Zulia (LUZ) and members of the local bar association, in a dynamic session. Due to their proximity to the Colombian border, the residents of Zulia have an immediate perspective on terrorism, particularly that which spills over the border. The participants' questions reflected these concerns. Given Dr. Rabasa's writings on the subject, the event concluded with the well-known public university extending an invitation for the speaker to return in the future.

MEDIA: TAKING HIS CASE TO THE PEOPLE

18. (U) PAS Caracas scheduled a great deal of media exposure for Dr. Rabasa, which he handled ably. Electronic media exposure came from live interviews on Union Radio Noticias (the largest all-news radio station in the country), Globovision (the nationwide 24-hour television news station), and "A Punto con Juan Carlos Fernandez," a morning news talk program in Maracaibo, broadcast simultaneously on two radio stations in Zulia and several TV stations in the western region of Venezuela. This latest was aired again in April on a newly-launched local cable TV channel. It was refreshing to have an expert of Dr. Rabasa's caliber also be able to converse with interviewers at a nearly-native level of fluency, which adds to the credibility of the interview.

19. (U) Rabasa's visit also garnered extensive print news coverage, primarily in the form of two exclusive interviews with large newspapers. In Caracas, Rabasa spoke with El Nacional, a leading broadsheet newspaper with national distribution. The daily dedicated a half-page to the interview, linking it to a story about the Colombian FARC insurgency. Maracaibo's leading daily, Panorama, which has of late taken a pro-government stance, delayed publication of Rabasa's interview, but eventually ran the story.

COMMENT

10. (U) Embassy Caracas appreciates Dr. Rabasa's willingness to endure a very full schedule, as well as both his expertise and language abilities, which combined led to an effective and worthwhile program, and provided a good foundation for future counterterrorism programming in Venezuela. Embassy Caracas also extends its appreciation to IIP for their assistance in preparing this speaker program.

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